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## SOME ILLUSTRATIVE SILENT-READING LESSONS

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A very common procedure in conducting a reading lesson is the oral-reading method. The distinguishing feature about the oral-reading method is the consecutive oral reading, sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph, of the unit being studied. The oral-reading method is very valuable in the primary grades. In the teaching of a unit of reading matter such as poetry, which has very prominent auditory values, the oral-reading method is always a valuable method. But in the past and in most schools even today a reading lesson in any grade with any type of material means an oral-reading lesson. Fifteen years ago Huey pointed out in his book on the *Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* the importance of training in silent reading. Judd and other leaders of today have brought forcibly to the attention of school people the importance of spending very much less time in the middle and upper grades in oral reading and developing a technique for silent-reading lessons. But many teachers are at a loss to know how to conduct a silent-reading lesson. It is the purpose of this article to give a detailed account of a few silent-reading recitations as samples of some of the things we are doing in our school in attempting to develop a teaching technique for silent-reading lessons.

### A FOURTH-GRADE PROBLEM LESSON

In one of our fourth readers is the story of "The Prodigal Son," about two pages. In the assignment for study the pupils were asked first to read the story through rather quickly from beginning to end, then to re-read it, considering the following problem questions:

1. Which of the two sons do you like better? List the points in favor of the older son. List the points in favor of the younger son. List the points against the younger son. List the points against the older son.

2. This story was told by Jesus to illustrate a father's love for his son. Select three sentences which show the father's love and indicate your selections by page and line.

The opinion of the class was about evenly divided on the first question. The lists suggested were worked out and formulated on the blackboard as group work and each pupil was left to decide for himself. The purpose of the problem was to get the pupils to examine the facts critically. A problem which leads to debate through difference of opinion is a fine type of problem, provided of course that its discussion involves the leading facts in the reading material. The spirit and enthusiasm with which the pupils debated this problem showed that this lesson, which might otherwise have been somewhat of a bore to the pupils, was a real enjoyment. The second problem of course was for the purpose of centering their attention upon the main idea running through the story. Details with reference to the pronunciation of words and the meaning of words and phrases came up for attention from time to time throughout the recitation but always as subordinate elements in relation to a larger problem.

#### A SEVENTH-GRADE PROBLEM LESSON

The following problems were used in connection with a series of five recitations on the *Man without a Country*:

1. Give facts and incidents that show how Nolan was punished for damning the United States and wishing never to hear of her again.
2. What were the main activities that Nolan had for occupying his time? List them in their order of importance.
3. Prove that Nolan loved his country dearly.
4. Contrast Nolan's character as a young man and his character as revealed in the story from about the age of forty until his death.
5. Select one of the most interesting incidents and be prepared to read it to the class.

It will be seen that in this plan there is no attempt to go through the story consecutively from the beginning to the end. Oftentimes the discussion on one of the problems would necessitate the pupil's relating a part of the story or would lead certain pupils to raise questions about the facts of the story, but these factual reproductions and questions were always subsidiary elements to a

problem involving concentration upon the large view of the story. Pupils who were able to take little or no part in the discussions were stimulated to read more selectively and with greater concentration in their study preparation for the next recitation. Sometimes when there was debate about a point the pupil would spontaneously read to the class a sentence or paragraph to prove his point. This type of oral reading and the type indicated in the fifth problem have some incentive, some purpose in contrast to the procedure which requires that all the material in the reading lesson must be read orally.

#### EXTENSIVE SILENT READING

A unit of reading material such as *Some Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Pyle is well adapted for extensive silent reading. The book consists of twelve chapters, one hundred and seventy-six pages. It was used with an upper fifth-grade class taught by Miss Blanche Turecheck. Ten recitation periods of thirty minutes each were used. The following are representative problems used as a basis of reports on assignments:

In the shooting of the deer which led to Robin Hood becoming an outlaw, who was most to blame, Robin Hood or the foresters?

Why was Little John so named?

What was the Sheriff's purpose in holding a shooting match?

In what three ways did Robin Hood disguise himself so the Sheriff did not know him?

What is the point of highest excitement in the chapter?

Select witty lines in this chapter.

The assignment involved one or two chapters to a recitation. The pupils were told to read the chapter through first without reference to the questions and then to go over it again, considering the questions and exercises written on the board for the chapter. The oral reading was of two types, that which came in naturally to prove the pupil's contention and that which was planned as a part of the class program, such as, "Select a witty saying in the chapter, write the page and line on a slip of paper, and be prepared to read it to the class." After the book was completed chapter by chapter, one recitation was used to get a perspective view of the whole with a consideration of such problems as the following:

Cite incidents showing Little John as the right-hand man.

List six places where Robin Hood and his band outwit the Sheriff.

Name the men Robin Hood could not overcome in single combat.

List five characteristics of Robin Hood's personality which helped to bring him good fortune throughout the stories.

The procedure with the unit of reading matter mentioned above was radically different from the procedure the writer once observed in connection with a similar unit. An eighth-grade class was studying a school edition of *Ivanhoe* containing two hundred and eight pages. The method used was the method of reading it orally page by page with discussion of the details. The discussion of the class was centered largely upon minor details with little consideration of the larger problems which might have been discussed after the pupils had all read the whole story silently. The class had completed the reading of a little over half of the book after five weeks or fifteen recitations. However, upon inquiry from the pupils it was discovered that most of the class had completed reading the book silently on the side at odd times. With any literary material of this kind there should be some oral reading, but to attempt to read orally all of a unit of this length is objectionable because it tends to throw the discussion too largely upon small points, and also because it is too slow a procedure with reference to the amount of material the class is able to cover. It also tends to slow up the individual's rate of silent reading. The point is that in the past this type of oral-reading procedure has been altogether too common, due to a conception handed down that a reading recitation means oral reading. We are coming to realize that the development of efficient silent readers is the most important phase of the reading problem in the middle and upper grades. The appreciation of good reading material of various types, including the distinctly literary types of course, is also important, and it is believed by the writer that, with the exception of poetry, pupils get more enjoyment out of the silent-reading method than they get out of the oral-reading method.

#### TRAINING IN SPEED AND COMPREHENSION

The following is an account by Miss Lucile Murphy of a recitation in silent reading with a seventh-grade class:

*Material:* "How I Killed a Bear" by Charles Dudley Warner.

*Purpose:* 1. To improve comprehension and increase rate.

2. To assist in the appreciation of the humor.

*Problem:* To plan a motion-picture based upon this story.

*Procedure:* 1. Statement of problem.

We see a great many moving pictures with many different plots. Where do you suppose the motion-picture director gets the stories for all the pictures he must produce? One pupil answered that people write them and another soon suggested that they take some from books. We are going to read a story this morning called "How I Killed a Bear" that I believe could be worked into an interesting motion picture. For the next half-hour let us forget that we are pupils of the Gardenville School and let us be motion-picture directors. Let us read through this story from the standpoint of a director and decide what scenes we will include and in what order.

2. Solution of the problem.

We will read ahead until we have decided upon the opening scene. The children set to work with a will, each one hoping to be the first to discover the opening scene. In a short time someone suggested it, adding graphic suggestions as to the arrangement of the stage and the action of the characters. All agreed to this and set to work to find the next scene. Here a difference of opinion arose. Some pupils wanted to include the account of the hero's previous experiences with a gun, but others objected on the score that this did not properly belong to the action "How I Killed a Bear." Some asked "Well, suppose you do include it, how are you going to connect it with the story?" This objection was quickly answered by a wide-awake boy who responded at once, "Don't they often show what people are thinking about in motion pictures? All you would have to do would be to have him hold his gun and look at it as though he were thinking and then show these things." Here the teacher stepped in. "Before we can decide what to include in our picture I believe it will be necessary to decide whether the picture is to be exciting, funny, sad, or romantic." The name of the story suggested that it was exciting to some, while others, influenced by the humorous account of the hero's past experience with a gun as just read, insisted that it would have to be funny. The teacher suggested that the class read on before deciding.

The humorous account of a colored cook's encounter with a bear was read by the children with general amusement as they were now on the lookout for humor. One member of the class who had insisted that this would make a good humorous picture, fearing that those on the opposing side would miss the point of the account, spontaneously rose and read aloud as soon as he discovered it, "He did not know whether she would agree with him." At this point all agreed that the picture was to be humorous. Then if our picture is to be humorous, what kind of incidents must we be sure to include? "Funny," the pupils replied in chorus.

As the pupils went on to discuss each scene, even such minute detail as the "glad surprise" of the bear was appreciated. The pupils decided that they would have to have a well-trained bear for if he failed to look glad the audience would lose one laugh. They decided to include what the man was thinking when the bear came toward him for it would certainly add humor. They explained that the scene in which the hero relates his experience to his home folks would have to be liberally interspersed with leaders, for the humor lay in the swift repartee. Then came a heated discussion as to the closing scene. Some wished to stop with the procession carrying the bear homeward, others with the crowd who assembled to view it, others with the hero just dropping off to sleep with "the last delicious thought," "I have killed a bear." This last suggestion was finally agreed upon for the pupils decided that if it were presented skillfully it could be made very funny.

The writer observed a part of this recitation and was struck with the enthusiasm and interest with which the pupils read and discussed. This is a fine example of the study-recitation type of silent reading, which should be used occasionally for the purpose of observing the pupils' silent-reading habits and for the purpose of developing better study habits. However, most of the silent-reading lessons should be of the type requiring definite study preparation in connection with problems set by the teacher or conceived by the pupils. This particular recitation is especially good in several respects. The method involved keeping constantly in mind the large view of the selection and at the same time a close scrutiny of the details in relation to the main problem. The pupils were learning how to select, compare, judge, exclude, appropriate, put together, and draw conclusions. It forced the slow readers to become more alert, concentrate better, and increase their rate of reading. The discussion helped them to keep the connection, to see their lack of thought-getting, and provided a motive for renewed effort. It resulted in keen appreciation of the characteristic elements of this unit of literature.

#### EACH PUPIL USING A DIFFERENT BOOK

In all of the preceding illustrations of recitation procedure in silent reading all pupils of the class had in hand a copy of the material. That is, all the pupils read and reported upon the same material. There should also be developed types of recitation procedure involving the use of different material on the part of

each individual of the class or on the part of groups within the class. This may be done by dividing the class into two or more groups, providing each group with a different reading book, and having each group report to the class as a whole upon their reading. The following is an account of a series of recitations involving the use of different material by each member of the class.

From a miscellaneous collection of third and fourth readers a sufficient number was selected to provide each pupil in a fourth-grade class with a book containing a story of from two to eight pages. The first recitation was given over to the distribution of the books, the choosing of the selection by each pupil, and suggestions regarding their silent reading and study in preparation for their reports to the class. After the books were distributed it was explained to the class that each pupil might choose a short selection of prose to read silently during study time with a view to reporting upon it to the class. The teacher inspected the choice of each pupil to see that a selection of the desired type was chosen. Most of the pupils made good selections but a few needed to be advised individually. Some even chose selections of poetry. This gave a good opportunity to teach some simple distinctions between poetry and prose. After the selections were all decided upon the pupils were given suggestions regarding silent reading and study. They were told first to note the subject carefully, then to read the selection through rapidly, and finally to read through it again more carefully, making preparation for the report. Their attention was called to the vocabularies in dictionary form in the back of some of the books and also to other study helps. Rather definite plans for the reports were then developed. It was decided, in giving the reports in the recitation, that the pupil would give the title of his selection and that one or more of the following plans might be utilized in connection with the report:

1. Tell the story briefly.
2. Tell why the title is a good one.
3. Suggest problems for the class to discuss.
4. Give opportunity for the pupils to ask questions.
5. Tell what interested you most.
6. Who was the leading character and what was the main thing the leading character did?
7. What was the main point of the selection?



In the four succeeding recitations all the pupils reported upon their selections. From four to six pupils reported during each thirty-minute recitation. It was necessary, of course, at times for the teacher to guide the report and the discussion. In one case a pupil failed to report correctly an important word in the title, showing that he had failed to get the main point of the selection. An investigation by a neighboring pupil brought out the main point. The pupil learned a point in pronunciation under a situation more conducive to retention than the usual fourth-grade reading situation. The pupils who had reported were allowed to exchange books and read whatever interested them during the program study period for reading. In this way a considerable amount of silent reading was done for the mere pleasure of it without any reference to a report. At the beginning some of the brighter pupils who volunteered were called upon for their reports as a means of setting a good example for the less capable ones. Then the reports of the better and of the poorer ones were alternated so as to avoid a situation conducive to a lack of interest.

A similar plan, which a number of teachers find feasible, involves the use of the room library, which consists of forty-five books suitable to the grade. One reading period a week for the room is given over to the returning and taking out of these library books and for the reports upon the books read. A plan similar to the one given above is followed in connection with these reports. This sort of plan enables the teacher to keep in close touch with the recreative reading of the pupils, stimulates interest in such reading, and enables the teacher to have a better knowledge of the pupils' reading interests and to lead the pupils to higher interests and tastes in reading.